



# Buddhists as Perpetrators: State Ideology vs. Religious Ideology in Myanmar

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## Abstract

This research project evaluates the root cause of the Rohingya genocide by comparing religious and state ideology. A comparison of these ideologies displayed a deeper issue within the Buddhist organizations throughout the Rakhine state. This research was conducted through an evaluation of articles and interviews detailing Burmese culture, victim accounts of the genocide, state laws, and extremist speeches delivered by Buddhist monks. Of the existing research, very little focuses on ideology or the unique role of Buddhists in this atrocity. This research shows that many Buddhists in the Rakhine state have shown a blatant disregard for - or developed an extreme interpretation of - their religious ideology and the lasting impact that British colonialism has had on Myanmar. Along with this, the research reveals Buddhist monks are the true leaders of the genocidal regime and establishes a connection between ideological power and religion in the state of Myanmar further proving the Rohingya genocide unique as a religious sponsored genocide using state ideology. Overall, the Rohingya genocide represents ties between state and religion which can directly influence the destruction of a people “in whole or in part” (UN Genocide Convention 1948).

References on back and available upon request.

## Overview

- Burmese military and local Burmese citizens in the Rakhine state are clearing Rohingya villages in the Rakhine state
- Aung San Suu Kyi was elected State Counsellor of Myanmar because of her past as a human rights advocate in Myanmar
  - She has not spoken out about the Rohingya genocide



Figure 1. Map of Southeast Asia

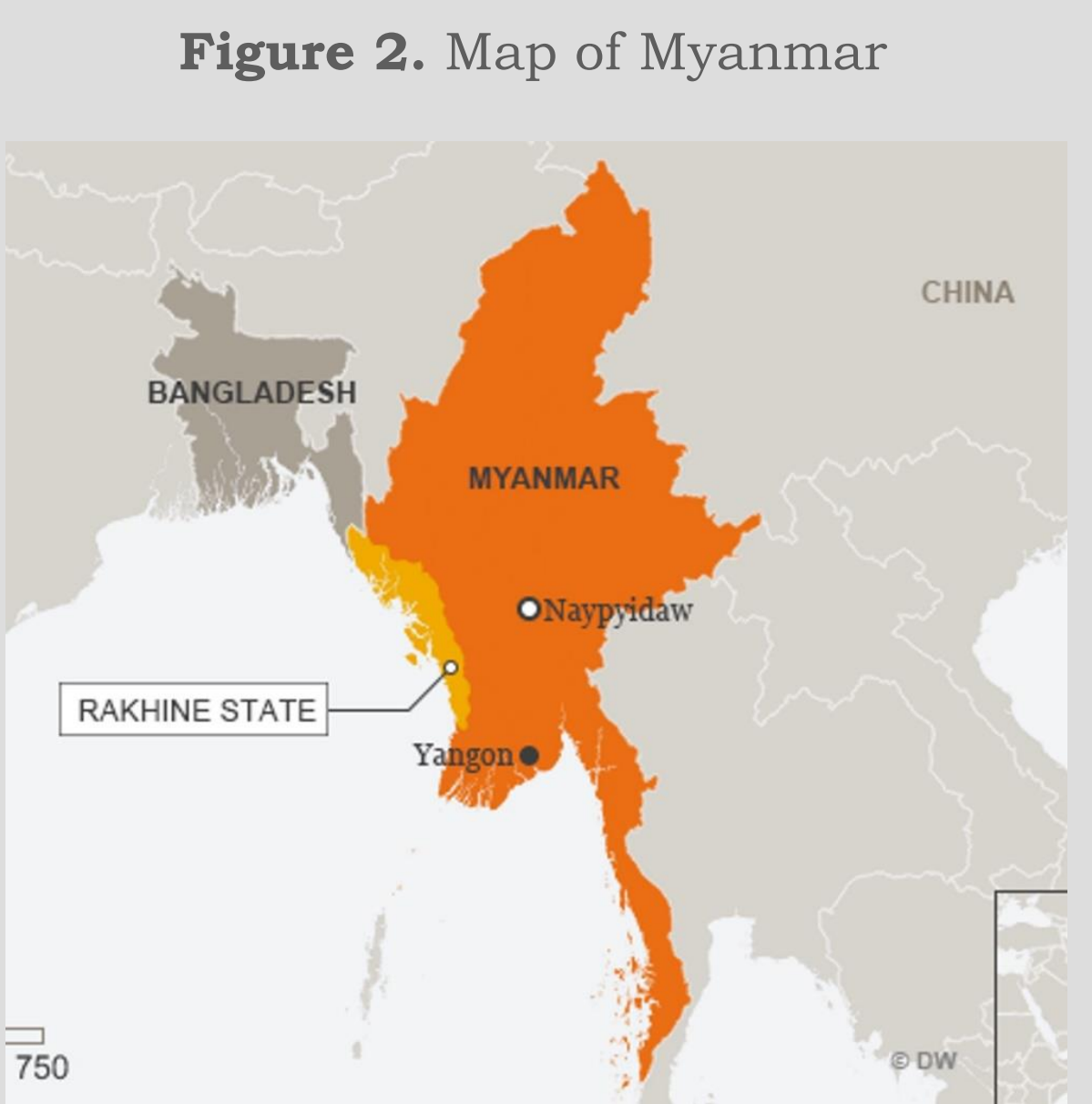


Figure 2. Map of Myanmar

## Burmese History

- 1824-1948: the British Empire occupied much of Southeast Asia including Burma
- 1948: Burma gains independence from Britain
- 1989: Burma renames itself Myanmar to wipe colonial history
- 2011: Thein Sein becomes President of Myanmar
- 2012: State of Emergency is declared in Myanmar
- 2012: Large-scale acts of violence begin taking place in the Rakhine state
- 2016: Genocidal attacks start to occur
- 2018: The UN declared genocide in Myanmar

## Buddhist Ideology

- Five Precepts of Buddhism:
    1. No harming living things
    2. No stealing
    2. No acts of sexual misconduct
    4. No lying or gossiping
    5. No drinking or drug usage
- (Starkey, 2018, p. 26)



Figure 3. Monks Protesting

## Rohingya

- Muslim minority in the Rakhine state
    - Make up 4% of Myanmar and 1/3 of Rakhine
  - Denied citizenship according to the 1982 Citizenship Law
- (Schober, 2017; Muhammad & Goraya, 2016)



Figure 4. Rohingya Refugees

## State Ideology

- 1982 Citizenship Act: “Ethnic groups as have settled in any of the territories included within the State as their permanent home from a period prior to 1185 B.E., 1823 A.D. are Burma citizens” (Pyithu Hluttaw, 1982, p. 2)
- Race and Religion Protection Laws:
  1. Monogamy Law
  2. Religious Conversion Law
  3. Interfaith Marriage Law
  4. Population Control Law



Figure 5.



Figure 6.

## Social Influences

Ana: “describe[s] power and its ability to impose order by coercion or force, deriving its authority from political office and military strength.”

Awza: “a kind of reverential authority that makes people spontaneously want to offer their services, but without any form of coercion...the moral quality of an individual beheld in the eyes of the community.”

Hpon: Spiritual Charisma- “his power radiates, and people come to him to give allegiance and to offer up services and trust”

(Kawanami, 2009, p. 222)

## Role of the Monks

- Monks use social influences of Awza and Hpon to persuade Buddhists in the Rakhine state
  - Not everyone is literate so in some cases what monks say is the only information Buddhists will receive
  - Many monks fear that Muslims are trying to take over their Myanmar, so they must be eliminated in order to save their religion
  - Leading monks in the conflict are organizers of the Ma Ba Tha and 969 Movement
  - Attend Anti-Muslim protests
- (Burke, 2016; Foxeus, 2016)



Figure 7.

Figure 5. Protest against the citizenship rights for Rohingya

Figure 6. Ashin Wirathu, cover of Times magazine

Figure 7. Rohingya refugees after the Tula Toli Massacre

## Conclusions

- Buddhist monks are using social constructs of Burmese society to influence Buddhists into following state ideology
- Because it is a religiously motivated genocide, the state itself does not have ultimate power in bringing an end to the atrocities
  - Religious organizations are using the Burmese military as an arm in the perpetration of the genocide
- Buddhists in the Rakhine are carrying out state ideology in order to preserve their religious ideology